

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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S E C R E T LISBON 4227

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PO, PFOR

SUBJ: INITIAL CALL ON PRESIDENT COSTA GOMES

REF: USUN 3573

SUMMARY: QUESTIONS RAISED BY REFTEL ANSWERED FRANKLY AND SATIS-
FACTORILY BY PRESIDENT COSTA GOMES. REPEATED STRONG AFFIRMA-
TION GOP FIDELITY TO INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND NATO MADE IN
SEPTEMBER 30 INAUGURAL SPEECH. STRONGLY DENIED LARGE COMMUNIST
INFLUENCE IN COUNTRY GENERALLY OUTSIDE LISBON AND ALENTEJO
AND EVEN MORE STRONGLY DENIED PRESENCE OF COMMUNISTS IN
AFM, SPECIFICALLY NAMING PRIME MINISTER AS NON-COMMUNIST.
SWEARING IN WAS SEPTEMBER 30 SO CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE
SHOULD GO OUT ASAP. FONMIN HAS INDICATED PRESIDENT DESIRES
MAKE UNGA ADDRESS PREVIOUSLY CONTEMPLATED BY SPINOLA AND
DESIROUS SEEING PRESIDENT FORD. END SUMMARY

1. ACCOMPANIED BY DCM I VISITED PRESIDENT COSTA GOMES
FOR ABOUT 45 MINUTES STARTING 1600 LOCAL TODAY. AFTER HANDING
HIM CONGRATULATORY LETTER BOTH PERSONALLY AND ON BEHALF USG,
I SAID I HAD ASKED FOR AN INTERVIEW SO SOON AFTER HIS ACCESSION
BECAUSE I WANTED TO EMPHASIZE MY GOVERNMENT'S GREAT INTEREST
IN PORTUGAL AND RECENT EVENTS THERE. I SAID MY
GOVERNMENT HAD RAISED SEVERAL QUESTIONS ON WHICH THEY WERE ANXIOUS

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TO HAVE HIS VIEWS. A HIGHLY IMPORTANT ONE, I SAID, HE HAD ANSWERED

IN HIS INAUGURAL SPEECH OF LAST NIGHT, NAMELY FIDELITY OF HIS NEW GOVERNMENT TO INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS OF PORTUGAL AND PARTICULARLY TO ITS MEMBERSHIP IN NATO.

2. TO THIS HE REPLIED AFFIRMATIVELY AND AT SOME LENGTH, POINTING OUT THAT HE WAS THE FIRST PORTUGUESE TO BECOME ACTIVE IN NATO AFFAIRS SOME 17 YEARS AGO AND HIS ACTIVITY AND ENTHUSIASM FOR THE ORGANIZATION HAD NEVER FLAGGED. IT IS HIS BELIEF THAT IT IS THE ABSOLUTE CORNERSTONE OF THE MAINTENANCE OF PEACE IN WESTERN EUROPE. HE STRONGLY DEPLORED THE RECENT DEFECTION OF GREECE BUT SAID HE HAD HOPE AND EVEN SOME CONFIDENCE THAT GREECE MIGHT COME BACK TO THE FOLD WHEN THEY "COME TO THEIR SENSES."

3. I THEN SAID THAT I WANTED TO EXPRESS, AS I HAD DONE PREVIOUSLY TO PRESIDENT SPINOLA, THE EXTREME CONCERN OF USG IN RELATION TO COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN AND SPECIFICALLY TO THE PRESENCE OF COMMUNISTS IN THE GOP. AS TO THE GOP I SAID THAT AN APPARENT LEFTIST SHIFT IN THE GOP AS THE RESULT OF RECENT EVENTS WAS NOT REASSURING. WHEN I ENUMERATED THE MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES WITH WHICH THE SECRETARY HAD PRIMARILY EXPRESSED CONCERN, HE AGREED BUT EMPHATICALLY SAID HE THOUGHT THE DANGER WAS FAR MORE ACUTE IN SPAIN THAN IN ANY OF THE OTHER COUNTRIES, INCLUDING ITALY. COMING FROM A TOWN NEAR SPANISH BORDER, HE KNEW SPAIN WELL AND FELT COMMUNISM WAS VERY WIDELY SPREAD THROUGHOUT COUNTRY.

4. AS TO PORTUGAL GENERALLY HE SAID THAT HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT THE COMMUNIST INFLUENCE WAS SMALL. IT IS CONSIDERABLE IN LISBON AND IN THE ALENTEJO, BUT IN THE NORTH, WHICH IS HIS HOME, IT IS NEGLIGIBLE. I ASKED HIM IF THE STRONG COMMUNIST INFLUENCE WAS LARGELY URBAN AND INDUSTRIAL AND NOT IN THE RURAL SECTIONS. HE SAID THIS WAS TRUE EXCEPT IN THE ALENTEJO WHERE THEY HAD MADE CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS IN THE RURAL DISTRICTS. I THEN ASKED ABOUT COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN HIS GOVERNMENT AND IN THE ARMED FORCES MOVEMENT (AFM). HE SAID MOST POSITIVELY THAT THERE WERE NO COMMUNISTS IN HIS GOVERNMENT EXCEPT CUNHAL AND SPECIFICALLY DENIED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WAS A COMMUNIST, (ALTHOUGH I HAD MADE NO MENTION OF THE PRIME MINISTER), AND ADDED THAT SOME OF HIS CAPITALIST FRIENDS EVEN CALL HIM A COMMUNIST. WHEN I PRESSED HIM ON THE AFM HE SAID THEY WERE ALL MILITARY MEN

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WHO HAD TAKEN AN OATH NOT TO ENGAGE IN POLITICS WITHOUT RESIGNING FROM THE ARMED FORCES AND HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT NONE OF THEM BELONGED TO THE PCP. COMMENT: IN MY OPINION THIS WAS CONSIDERABLY LESS THAN FRANK, BUT I REPORT ACCURATELY WHAT HE SAID.

5. HE THEN SAID THAT HE WAS AWARE THAT A CONSIDERABLE PART OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AND LARGE SEGMENT OF THE AMERICAN MEDIA THOUGHT THAT PORTUGAL WAS RIDDLED WITH COMMUNISM. HE SAID HE

MIGHT POINT OUT THAT PEOPLE IN VIRTUALLY ALL LATIN COUNTRIES, ESPECIALLY SPAIN AND PORTUGAL, ARE COMPLETELY CONVINCED THAT THEIR COUNTRY IS THE OBJECT OF ENORMOUS COVERT ACTIVITY BY THE CIA. HE SAID HE KNEW THAT NEITHER ACCUSATION WAS TRUE, BUT IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO CHANGE SUCH OPINIONS. I SAID THAT WAS TRUE, BUT IT WAS ENORMOUSLY IMPORTANT, IN THE PRESENT IMPORTANT STAGE OF BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE USG AND THE GOP, THAT THE USG ITSELF SHOULD HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT PORTUGAL WAS NOT IN DANGER OF BECOMING A COMMUNIST STATE.

6. I ALSO SAID THAT I THOUGHT THE PORTUGUESE PRESS, TELEVISION AND RADIO BORE A HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WIDELY HELD VIEW THAT COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN PORTUGAL WAS ENORMOUS. HE AGREED AND SPECIFICALLY SAID THAT HE REGARDED IT AS THE FIRST PRIORITY OF HIS GOVERNMENT TO "DISCIPLINE" THE MEDIA IN SUCH A WAY AS TO PUT AN END TO THEIR OBVIOUS LEFTWARD BIAS. HE DIFFERENTIATED BETWEEN THE RADIO, WHICH WAS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCP), THE PRESS, INFLUENCED MORE BY PARTIES TO THE LEFT OF THE PCP (SPECIFICALLY MENTIONING THE MRPP AND THE PRP--THE REVOLUTIONARY PROLETARIAT PARTY), AND THE TV, WHERE HE SAID THE SITUATION HAD ALREADY IMPROVED.

7. CONCERNING RECENT CRISIS, HE SAID THAT PRIOR TO LAST WEEKEND THERE HAD BEEN SERIOUS DIVERGENCES AMONG THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES. HE FELT THAT DEPARTURE OF DISCORDANT ELEMENTS WOULD PERMIT GREATER STABILITY IN FUTURE.

8. HE CONFIRMED THAT HE WILL REMAIN CHIEF OF STAFF OF ARMED FORCES AS WELL AS PRESIDENT.

9. SUBSEQUENT TO CALL ON COSTA GOMES, I SAW FONMIN SOARES WHO STATED THAT PRESIDENT COSTA GOMES INTENDS TO FOLLOW HIS PREDECESSOR'S PLANS TO ADDRESS UN ON OCTOBER 24, AND SOARES IS
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INSTRUCTING UN AMBASSADOR VEIGA SIMAO TO CONFIRM THAT DATE WITH UN. COSTA GOMES ALSO HOPES TO CALL ON PRESIDENT FORD ON OCTOBER 23, AS SECRETARY HAD INDICATED TO SOARES WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR SPINOLA. SOARES IS INSTRUCTING AMBASSADOR THEMIDO TO FOLLOW UP ON THIS MATTER.

10. ACTION REQUESTED: (A) SINCE COSTA GOMES TOOK OATH OF OFFICE SAME DAY AS HIS FORMAL DESIGNATION AS PRESIDENT (SEPTEMBER 30) CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE IS IN ORDER IMMEDIATELY. (B) I CONSIDER IT IMPORTANT FOR THE IMPRESSION WE GIVE TO THE NEW REGIME OF ITS ACCEPTABILITY IN RELATION TO ITS IMMEDIATE PREDECESSOR THAT EVERY EFFORT BE MADE TO SATISFY GOP EXPECTATION THAT OCTOBER 23 MEETING WITH PRESIDENT FORD WILL TAKE PLACE. ADVISE.
SCOTT

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NNN

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